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Online Search in the Age of AI: Subjectivation and the Sealing of Knowledges

Online search is increasingly shifting from finding and navigating different websites toward receiving AI-generated answers, from Google's AI Overviews to ChatGPT. This talk introduces the concept of "sealed knowledges" to describe what is at stake in this transformation. When search engines compress multiple sources, perspectives, and possibilities to answer into a single plausible output, they obscure the situated and contested nature of knowledge and make alternative and marginalized perspectives harder to encounter. At the same time, these systems shape how users relate to knowledge and to themselves as knowing subjects, encouraging particular forms of information behaviour, trust, and epistemic agency.